

VZCZCXRO5111
PP RUEHDBU
DE RUEHNT #0878/01 1240112
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 040112Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY TASHKENT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7789
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0852
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0295
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 1153
RUEHBM/AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST 0066
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 1986
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0758

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TASHKENT 000878

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN AND DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/03/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [EUN](#) [UZ](#)

SUBJECT: THE VIEW FROM TASHKENT ON THE FUTURE OF EU
SANCTIONS

REF: A. TASHKENT 869 (NOTAL)

[1](#)B. TASHKENT 830 (NOTAL)

[1](#)C. TASHKENT 792 (NOTAL)

[1](#)D. TASHKENT 770 (NOTAL)

Classified By: CDA BRAD HANSON, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: European Union sanctions against Uzbekistan are due for review in Brussels on May 14. Several Tashkent-based European diplomats have told emboffs that recent provocative actions by the Uzbek government in the area of human rights have made it more certain that the sanctions will remain in force. Post's diplomatic contacts are virtually unanimous in stating that Uzbekistan has made no concrete, positive steps that would justify lifting sanctions. The only realistic options, according to Post's sources, are to leave sanctions unchanged or, more likely, to remove certain names from the visa ban list that is associated with the sanctions. The strongest proponent for reducing sanctions is reportedly Germany, whose Foreign Ministry hopes to institute a Central Asian regional strategy by the end of its EU presidency. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) European Union sanctions against Uzbekistan, which have been in force since October 2005, are due for review on May 14 by the EU's General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC). According to several European diplomats in Tashkent, recent provocative actions by the Government of Uzbekistan in the area of human rights have made it more certain that the sanctions will remain in place. Human Rights Watch, the only international nongovernmental watchdog remaining in Uzbekistan, has advocated tirelessly for the EU to maintain sanctions, citing continuing detention of more than a dozen prominent activists. On May 1, a Tashkent court convicted Human Rights Watch's local staffer, Umida Niyazova, of distributing subversive literature and other charges and sentenced her to seven years' imprisonment (ref A). The Ministry of Justice denied Human Rights Watch's office director, Andrea Berg, a renewal of her accreditation, but the Foreign Minister grudgingly reversed the decision only a few days later, issuing her a three-month extension while threatening to expel her if she continued to criticize the government (ref B). The government has filed criminal charges against three Deutsche Welle reporters in recent weeks (ref C). EU representatives have conducted two expert visits, last December and in April, to discuss Uzbekistan's response to the Andijon events, but diplomatic sources involved in the visits report that no concrete progress has

resulted (ref D). The EU/Uzbekistan human rights dialogue under their joint consultative council subcommittee is set to start May 7-9 with a delegation to Tashkent.

13. (C) British Charge d'Affaires Hugh Taylor told Charge on May 2 that no one among the EU member states represented in Tashkent is arguing for complete lifting of sanctions, with the possible exception of the Romanian representative, who seems to have instructions to argue for lifting. UK Charge surmises that there are Romanian defense contractors eager to sell arms to Uzbekistan. (Comment: This is very strange, as Romania incurred Uzbekistan's wrath after Romania took in over 400 Uzbek refugees in the aftermath of the Andijon events. End comment.) UK Charge noted also that the attitude of local EU Chiefs of Mission regarding sanctions has hardened recently as a result of lack of progress, and even retrogression by the Uzbek government, on human rights issues. He said that German mission members in particular, including their Ambassador, feel burned by the Uzbeks over criminal investigations and harassment of Deutsche Welle journalists and the question of accreditation of Human Rights Watch's office director--a German citizen. German DCM told Charge May 3 that the debate in Brussels May 14 will most likely be between retaining sanctions as they are and lessening sanctions by removing some names from the visa ban list. German DCM, clearly exasperated by all the missed opportunities on human rights by the Uzbek government, stated that no one can say the German EU presidency did not give the Uzbeks ample opportunities to convince the EU to lift sanctions.

14. (C) The British Embassy's political and press officer told emboffs in a separate meeting that it is widely acknowledged that the sanctions have little practical effect; however,

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they have a significant political effect in damaging President Karimov's prestige, which is of paramount importance to him. He commented that the Uzbeks have made concessions on process, but not on substance. He cited a greater willingness by Uzbek counterparts to grant meetings and participate in seminars. At the same time, he said, the Uzbeks are masters of holding conferences and seminars purely for prestige value, but without any practical result.

15. (C) A likely compromise would involve removing certain names from the list of Uzbek officials on the EU's visa ban list. Much of the discussion in EU circles now, according to UK Charge, centers on whether to drop names and, if so, which ones. He said that the British government can probably live with dropping two or so names from the list, while other EU states are reportedly arguing for dropping more names. (Note: The names being considered, we understand, are of officials who have left their jobs for one reason or another since they were placed on the list. End note.)

16. (C) UK Charge told Charge that his mission has picked up on major differences of opinion between the German Chancellor's office and the German MFA, with the latter arguing for a greater reduction in sanctions, i.e., removing more names from the visa ban list. A driving impetus for the Germans, he said, is their desire to launch an EU Central Asia Strategy before the end of their presidency, and the widespread view that Uzbekistan's cooperation in this strategy is necessary.

17. (C) In a contrasting view, the British Embassy's political and press officer told emboffs that Uzbekistan "doesn't do regional cooperation." He said that the Uzbeks "do not see Tajikistan or Kyrgyzstan as real countries," and that they do not trust Kazakhstan -- "at least not as a regional partner with whom they can share secret information." In the same discussion, the French DCM commented that the EU could just as easily have launched a cooperation strategy with Kazakhstan alone; the other Central Asian republics, he said, generally view the rising EU interest only as a means of

attracting money.

18. (C) Comment: The predominant message coming from our Tashkent diplomatic counterparts is that sanctions will remain in place, but most likely at least two names will be removed from the visa ban list. We agree that the sanctions have little, if any, practical effect, but the political and psychological effect on the Karimov regime is palpable and important.

HANSON